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PLYMOUTH CHURCH—II.

BY RUTH McCULLOCH.

PLYMOUTH Church, from 1877 to 1900, was a House of Life. So its pastor for fourteen years, Oscar C. McCulloch, named it and developed it, believing that Christ was sent to bring abundant life to the world and that the church as His special agency should carry on His work.

The church doors stood open day and night—all week—with some three thousand people passing in and out for the Sunday services, lectures, entertainments, literary and instructive classes, reading-room, gymnasium, saving and loan association and philanthropic offices. Many can remember that large square red brick building without a steeple as it stood on Meridian and New York streets, with its open doors inviting all the city to a higher, fuller life.

It was an "institutional church" in the days when such churches were few and were widely criticised. Now when every church has its wider reach into city life, and broader interpretation of the religious life as the whole life, it is hard to realize that this has come to pass within only thirty years, through the leadership of such pioneer workers as those of Plymouth Church.

Mr. McCulloch in 1877 came from Sheboygan, Wisconsin, to this church, situated as it then was on the corner of Circle and Meridian streets, with a small and earnest membership desirous of a fuller religious life. His idea that the religious life comprises the social, home and business life, impelling towards justice, kindness and aspiration equally in all relations, found ready response in his congregation, as Christ's true and simple message. And

they worked with him in carrying this message into practical application. He felt that as a minister his parish was the whole city; so he took increasing share in civic and charitable efforts, drawing with him his people as active helpers when help was needed. Thus Plymouth Church came to be recognized as a great center of living Christianity, civic altruism and culture, a true House of Life with open doors for all.

The problems of the usefulness of his church, Mr. McCulloch took up with ardent enthusiasm. He brought to his ministry the influence of a cultured Wisconsin home, five years of active business life and practical philanthropic work, three years of definite theological study in the seminary and seven years of church work in Sheboygan. His spiritual insight, power of constructive thought, practical judgment and open-minded recognition of others' efforts were great forces when allied with a winning personality, a tender heart and high ideals.

In his wide reading and travels he had collected many ideas that helped him in planning his work, and he was constantly in communication by letter and visit with authors and workers all over the country. Henry Ward Beecher, Lyman Abbot, Edward Everett Hale, Jane Addams, Edward Eggleston, David Starr Jordan and others shared their experiences with him, while he drew rich inspiration and freshened outlook from the reading of old and new masters of thought in religion, science and economics. The action of a consecrated purpose and energetic mind on these materials resulted in the building up of a uniquely useful and live church, the units of which were magnetized by the fervent love and steady light of their chosen leader.

At this early time the life of the church consisted of the Sunday-school, the morning and evening services, the Ladies' Union and the Young People's Society, lines of usefulness that developed under Mr. McCulloch's guidance into new helpfulness, of which more extended account will follow. Working with their pastor, the church soon gained momentum in its services and organization and attracted many new and earnest workers, a large percentage of whom had not before been identified with church life.

By 1884 the congregation required a larger building in which to carry on its work and express its widening influence. By the sale of bonds, free contributions and careful attention to details of management, the large new church was erected. In the wide rooms and halls thus provided this House of Life grew to its fullest in ministry to thousands.

It was felt by the membership that many of "the unchurched" were kept from spiritual fellowship by the rigid creed formerly demanded for admission to the church. Christ's simple words, "Come, follow me," to his first disciples, were considered to embody the essential pledge to Christian life, the basic element in all statement of creed. It was therefore adopted as the one needful promise for alliance with the church, being expressed in the church constitution:

"The idea of this church is that of a body of brethren and sisters, friends, associated for Christian work and worship. Its members strive to do to others as they would be done by, and to undertake such work as may be thought to lie within the scope of a Christian church.

"As a church of Jesus Christ, gathered in His name and to do His work, we declare our union in faith and love with all who love Him.

"We associate ourselves together for Christian worship and for Christian work, pledging ourselves to carry out the objects of this church.

"These objects are: Public worship of God, weekly renewal of religious sympathies and affections, mutual acquaintance and assistance, and the alleviation, by physical and spiritual means, of poverty, ignorance, misery, vice and crime.

"To carry out these objects, we pledge our time, our talents and our money according to our ability.

"Come with us; for the world needs you and yours."

Attracted by this kindness of welcome and simplicity of aspiration, men, women and children from all walks of life gathered for the services; teachers, commercial travelers, professional men, men of low degree as well as men of high degree, truly "all sorts

and conditions of men," united in their belief in one fatherly God and His good purpose for their lives.

Mr. McCulloch's sermons, morning and evening, conveyed his thought to his people with the force of sincerity and clearness. He was close to God and drew others into nearness also, as he explained God's presence in all the things of the world and His will in personal lives. His words brought light to the bewildered, comfort to the sorrowing and energy to the eager. He pointed out the good wherever found, and talked of it in such a way as to make others desire it. He urged all to find their God-imposed task of usefulness and to perform it for the Larger Good. As Good thrilled him, so Wrong aroused his opposition. He studied and denounced from the pulpit all selfishness and cruelty, either individual or collective, keeping well abreast of daily occurrences that were occupying men's minds and claiming their activities. On the burning questions of capital punishment, wages and labor, prison conditions, war, industrial evils, etc., he took a courageously definite stand on highest ethical grounds, urging each individual's responsibility for right, strong action in regard to them.

The congregations were large, often testing the capacity of the building—even many being unable to enter because of the pressure. It was his observation that the evening services drew the most needy and wistful souls, and he made particular effort to feed and satisfy them. His word was always helpful and illuminating, but he added on occasion illustrated talks and musical services. Once a month the evening sermon was illustrated with stereopticon pictures thrown upon the screen. A series on the Life of Christ was given with all the beautiful world-known portrayal of it in picture and music. Another series was the Inspirational Poems of the World, including Burns's "Cotter's Saturday Night" and religious poems of Whittier. Another evening was given to "Our Dumb Animals," with famous pictures by Landseer and Rosa Bonheur, with a lesson on kindness to animals.

Many of these slides were made to order from copies of pictures obtained by Mr. McCulloch in his travels. The collection became widely known and was sent for and used in other cities.

Not only through the eye was the imagination of the people kindled but through the ear also, for Plymouth Church possessed a great organ with special attachments which was the delight of all performers and music-lovers in the city. The monthly song services with organ-harmonies were eagerly watched for and attended. The pastor published a collection of Hymns of Faith and Hope, drawn from all sources, for the use of his church.

Mr. McCulloch loved children dearly, seeing in them what Christ saw of innate good and trust and right impulse, seeking guidance in a difficult world. His personal relationship with them was very beautiful and tender. He gathered them about him for stories or excursions into the fields and woods for flowers or nuts or watching the birds, seeing God in all nature. Often the children were invited to an afternoon romp in the big church-room upstairs; or for games and refreshment; or a dolls' reception. In his morning sermon a special story-talk always came first for the children, enjoyed keenly also by their elders, and they took part in the services at Christmas, Easter and Children's Day, when they each received a potted plant or bulb. Thus they felt their place in the church life. These children, now mature men and women, speak of this early influence with appreciation and reverence.

In the primary grade of the Sunday-school the then new kindergarten methods were introduced, following Froebel's ideas of sense and thought connection. Simple songs, Bible stories and nature studies were provided. A study of Christ's life was arranged for pupils of the older classes, with special emphasis on character development, thus making the connection evident between the Old Story and the young life studying it, seeking a way to imitate it. Adult classes studied under earnest teachers certain helpful inspirational books, such as Carpenter's "Three Gospels." The Sunday-school song-book contained cheerful and melodious songs, old and new, that the children loved to sing. They formed choruses under skilled leaders and had an orchestra of many instruments. Each child made a weekly pledge of money that enabled the school to be not only self-sustaining but to con-

tribute generously to the Orphan Asylum, the Newsboys' Home, and the Coal Mine Mission. This developed altruism and a sense of business responsibility.

The women of the church were organized into the Ladies' Union, meeting monthly for charitable sewing, church-house-keeping, money-raising, home missions and other combinations of effort. The idea of a monthly church supper and social was carried out with great success, drawing great numbers and creating general cordial relations.

Mr. McCulloch collected and published a book of songs, known as Plymouth Songs, containing such old favorites as "The Old Oaken Bucket," "Marching Through Georgia," "Home, Sweet Home," "It's a Way We Have at Plymouth," etc. Singing these lustily together promoted great friendliness and pleasure and made the socials memorable.

Once on a visit among the poor he found a new-born baby wrapped only in a gunny-sack, as no preparation had been possible for the poor, sick and discouraged mother. The Maternity Society was immediately organized in the Ladies' Union and many little garments were made in anticipation of such need. This source of supply became known throughout the city and was freely drawn upon as occasion required.

The Young People's Circle was a great source of energetic life in the church, enlisting as it did all the primitive and newly awakened forces in combined effort. The same principle was utilized in a particular way among the young girls composing the King's Daughters Circle, affording an opportunity for usefulness and help among them. Mr. McCulloch realized that people became more intimately acquainted and ripened into friendships quicker when working together in the accomplishment of a worthy purpose—at the same time developing their abilities. He had keen discernment in perceiving the abilities of people and in setting them to work. In addition to these regular branches of church work there was the Thursday evening meeting for prayer and communion and "conversation on ideals."

The institutional features that were distinctive developed grad-

ually and naturally as the idea of a fuller life through the education of faculties materialized and the eager workers became anxious to reach other lives wistful for higher opportunity. This was before the day of Y. M. C. A. classes, the night schools and settlement houses.

A reading room was established, supplied with a large number of books, magazines and papers. Centrally located as it was, it became very popular and during the day and evening was in steady use.

The Indianapolis Lecture Course, for many years a great feature of Plymouth life, brought noted speakers, home and foreign, every two weeks to talk on the great themes of the day. Beecher, Matthew Arnold, Canon Farrar, Henry George, Justin McCarthy, Senator Bruce, Booker Washington, Lew Wallace and Amelia Edwards were among the prominent workers in all fields who contributed to the "more abundant" life of Indianapolis. The prices were nominal—five lectures for a dollar—and the crowded houses sustained the lecture course. The Plymouth auditorium was an open forum and any entertainment that was intellectually worthy and contributed to the higher life was welcome. Sometimes a famous entertainer would read or recite, or a noted singer or instrumentalist would occupy an evening. Thus many tired minds were refreshed, flagging spirits were stimulated and thousands had happier and fuller life because of Plymouth and its ministry in Indianapolis.

A gymnasium was fitted up in the basement for the boys and men and young women, in charge of competent instructors, and the opportunity was much used for physical development and athletic enjoyment.

To develop thrift and habits of business along right lines, The Plymouth Saving and Loan Association was established to encourage small savings and to make loans at low interest rate. Laboring people of all ages were thus enabled to make their deposits—dimes, quarters or dollars—weekly, at interest, making a beginning toward future competence or the inevitable "rainy day." It was one of the first endeavors of the kind in the State and resulted in much good.

A travel class met twice a month to roam in imagination over the world. Its motto was, "He knows no land who only knows his own." They studied the great cities of Europe by book, stereopticon and descriptions of eye-witnesses; and in 1891 the class took a three months' trip abroad under Mr. McCulloch's guidance, visiting the places they had studied.

Mr. McCulloch's business training and natural aptitude for organization were constantly employed in the conduct and management of these varied lines of work. He was always able to arouse the interest and energies of those about him, and was thus able to relegate much of the work to responsible committees; but he was ex-officio chairman of every committee and saw to it that things were done. He made great use of publicity methods, in leaflets, circulars, cards of special appeal, newspaper channels, etc. The entire Plymouth enterprise was managed in accordance with strict business methods.

As the need appeared, classes were formed to study mathematics, domestic economy, literature, stenography, civics and any subject that a given number of people desired to study. This was known as the Plymouth Institute, opened in 1884, "a school for busy people." Instruction was offered at a low rate, thus remunerating earnest teachers, and enabling servants and other day workers in office, store or factory to spend their evenings in enlarging their cramped faculties, in acquiring knowledge and fellowship and higher training. This work developed rapidly and some of the classes became famous in the city. Special Browning, Hawthorne and Emerson studies were notably pursued.

Friday afternoon lectures on historical subjects pertaining to our state and country, filled the auditorium successively for a long period with school children. Men and women of note from near and far talked on such themes as, "Women of the Revolution," "The Indians," "Pioneer Life in Indiana," "Mexico," "Heinrich Hudson's Voyage in the Half Moon," "William Penn," etc. It was a similar movement to that carried on by the Old South Church in Boston and was very successful in con-

veying impressions of the heroic life lived to establish peace and welfare in our common country. "Boys are scarcer than dollars," was an impelling thought with Mr. McCulloch. "Good boys will make good men; let us help them by showing them noble examples in our history."

The church auditorium was open to outside engagements—high school graduation exercises, conventions of teachers and civic gatherings. In a special room upstairs, the Indianapolis Literary Club held its weekly meetings for fifteen years. The ladies of the Flower Mission made headquarters here for the planning and execution of their tender work. Every room in the house was occupied almost constantly by groups of eager people engaged in some branch of the Father's business. One-half of the lower floor of the administration part of the building was occupied permanently by the offices of the Charity Organization Society and the Indianapolis Benevolent Society, and hither came not only all who were engaged in carrying on these instrumentalities, but the weary poor driven to the limit by their deprivations and troubles.

In 1878 Mr. McCulloch had accepted the presidency of the Benevolent Society, then at so low an ebb of vitality that the propriety of disbanding was under consideration. He was immediately interested in the possibilities of helpful work and made suggestions as to feasible activities with such enthusiasm that the leadership was unanimously bestowed upon him; and he was re-elected year after year until his death in 1891.

In taking up this work for the whole city he studied the situation carefully and began the institution of thorough measures of relief, the uppermost ideas being systematization of all the charities of the city and the education of the needy to self-help, and thus the prevention of pauperism. Prominent men of the city worked with him in planning and execution. Every case of need was recorded. Investigation was the basis of relief. The strictly meritorious and those down temporarily and because of chance misfortune were recognized; those who followed alms-taking as a trade or business, and were always dependent, were

recognized, also, as the problem to be solved in the last analysis of benevolence. Out of this came the data that made possible his treatise on "The Tribe of Ishmael," a study of progressive family degeneracy running back through several generations to a single pair whose progeny, at the writing, numbered over three thousand souls.

The Charity Organization Society was formulated in 1880 as a "clearing house" in the administration of intelligent help. Applicants for relief were referred to various allied organizations, such as the Orphan Asylum; the Friendly Inn and wood-yard, where work and relief were associated; the Flower Mission, with trained nurses if needed; or to some one of the many church agencies, the township relief officer, etc. County asylums and prisons throughout the State were visited and studied with a view to better care of the inmates and agitation for reforms. The Children's Aid Society and Free Kindergarten undertook the great task of caring for and training dependent and neglected children.

Authority was sought in the Legislature for the establishment of a Board of Children's Guardians with legal power to protect children against the abuse and evil influences of unworthy parents. This law has resulted in great good to hundreds of children during the years since, in being separated from their vicious parents and placed in good homes.

The workhouse, free bath and a dime saving association were other lines of work started by the awakened altruism at this time. The Summer Mission for sick babies and their mothers at Fairview Park was begun at this time and has grown and extended into large proportions. Cottages have been built and furnished year after year, by the McCulloch Club, churches and enthusiastic individuals, until a small village has arisen, the original cottage having been christened "McCulloch Cottage."

Much might be said concerning each of these efforts in detail, as they are still operative and well-known for their effective helpfulness. They make a long chapter in the life story of one man; of his initiative, his executive capacity and success in enlisting helpers for the time and those upon whom his mantle fell.

In all these efforts Mr. McCulloch and his church were leading actors. Great labor was called for in arousing and molding public opinion and in effecting the organization and support of the various measures. His courage and energy and wisdom were unflagging. As the work developed rapidly the Indiana associated charities became foremost in the country for effectiveness. In 1890 Mr. McCulloch was elected president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, and the 1891 meeting was held in Plymouth Church. This was in May, and was the last public appearance of Mr. McCulloch in connection with the charities to which he had given so much of his life and effort.

After his death in December, 1891, the church activities continued as before for some time, but without the moving enthusiasm lent by their instigator. Under the pastorate of Mr. Dewhurst, who succeeded him, a neighborhood settlement house was opened in a congested quarter of the city where good influences were exerted by classes and club work. In 1903 the church property was taken by the general government for the erection of the post office building, and the institutional character of the church was changed by its up-town location.

But in its life it had started forces that will never die. It had demonstrated the usefulness of the church as a House of Life for a city's people; inasmuch as the people who met there lived better lives for it. The organizations born there are still existing in higher development, though in new offices and in some cases under new names. For they were based on true principles of service to human need in its many phases. Indianapolis is a city known far for its well-organized charities, and for its general culture, largely because a church door stood open all day, and every day and night, instead of three hours a week.